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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 003486

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY FRENCH REACTION TO U.S. VIEWS ON
POST-ELECTION INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 1520

Classified By: Acting DCM Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In preliminary comments on the U.S. nonpaper on an international framework of support for Lebanon (reftel), Presidential Middle East Advisor Dominique Boche confirmed GoF support for an international meeting on Lebanon but cautioned that we should remain discreet in preparations to ensure it does not become an issue in Lebanon's electoral campaign. Boche urged that such a meeting should avoid addressing military/security cooperation and not give the impression of an international effort to disarm militias, which would put the new government in a difficult position. While stressing that the GoF was still formulating its views, Boche suggested that the GoF might advocate focusing efforts on two (rather than three) priority areas: rule of law and economic assistance. The GoF was also reflecting whether it might be more effective to have one, vice two, international gatherings, to avoid misinterpretations from the Lebanese side and focus on the international response. Boche also raised the familiar French argument that we must avoid any impression of creating a system of international "tutelage" in Lebanon, which retained a long democratic tradition and was not comparable with Afghanistan or Iraq. MFA contacts stressed the "no tutelage" point in much more detail during a separate discussion, and were generally more cautious and negative on the U.S. paper than the Elysee. Both Elysee and MFA contacts welcomed the idea of holding an informal planning meeting in Paris the week of June 13 and did not comment on proposed participants. End summary.

12. (C) During a May 19 meeting with poloff, Presidential Middle East advisor Dominique Boche commented on the U.S. nonpaper on a proposed international framework of support for Lebanon presented to French Ambassador Emie May 16 reftel). From the outset, Boche stressed that the GoF was still formulating a response and his views were only preliminary. That said, he noted that the GoF shared the U.S. desire to maintain international attention on Lebanon after elections, and favored the idea of an international meeting focused on supporting Lebanon's new government. The meeting would need to be well-calibrated to avoid creating unrealistic Lebanese expectations of a massive increase in economic aid. He stressed that we needed to work rapidly to prepare for the post-election phase, but also should be careful not to publicize our efforts and keep our consultations at the experts level, to avoid having them become an issue in Lebanon's election campaign or a topic of speculation or distortion in the scoop-hungry Lebanese press.

13. (C) Boche stressed the need to have a "correct" local Lebanese perception of our efforts, and suggested focusing the international meeting on less-controversial issues, such as rule of law, institutional aid, and economic assistance. Repeating arguments made by French Ambassador Emie in Beirut (reftel), Boche strongly cautioned against adding a security/military element to the conference, which he said would be interpreted very negatively in Lebanon. In the GOF view, security and military assistance to Lebanon should proceed discreetly via bilateral channels, although of course donors could exchange information to better coordinate their efforts. Boche similarly cautioned that the international conference should not be interpreted as a tactic to implement "part two" of UNSCR 1559, i.e. disarm militias, which remained a delicate issue in Lebanon and would put the new government in a difficult spot. Boche noted that while the worst had been avoided, after the compromises reached between Christian and Muslim opposition factions following divisions over the 2000 electoral law, the episode exposed the fragility and inherent fissures in Lebanon's opposition.

14. (C) Boche also noted that the GoF was hearing concerns from some Lebanese interlocutors over perceived U.S. plans to inscribe Lebanon in part of a larger USG plan to transform the region. Repeating a familiar GoF point, he stressed that Lebanon was an "old democracy" and did not want to be treated like Afghanistan or Iraq; we should avoid any impression of seeking to create a system of international tutelage over Lebanon. Poloff countered the misimpression that the U.S. was seeking any form of tutelage over Lebanon, which was without factual basis; the very nature of our joint effort with France was to help Lebanon realize its full independence and sovereignty, not to replace Syrian domination of Lebanon with another outside power broker. Similarly, the USG fully

recognized the distinct character of Lebanon and was not seeking to "cut and paste" an Afghanistan or Iraq model; at the same time, we should not dismiss the important democratic achievements in Afghanistan and Iraq as having no relevance to the people of Lebanon or the rest of the region.

15. (C) In closing, Boche commented that the GoF was reflecting on whether it might make more sense to focus our efforts on two tracks, such as rule of law and economic assistance, vice the U.S.-proposed political, economic and security/military tracks. The GoF was similarly considering whether it might be more effective to hold one conference, vice the proposed two, in order to avoid misinterpretations of our intentions among the Lebanese and focus on the international response to Lebanon's needs. Boche welcomed the idea of holding an informal planning meeting in Paris the week of June 13, and did not question the U.S.-proposed participants in the core donor planning group.

16. (C) In a separate discussion with poloff May 18, MFA DAS-equivalent for Levant/Egypt Christian Jouret offered a more cautious and negative preliminary reaction to the U.S. paper. Like Boche, Jouret stressed that the GoF was still digesting the U.S. proposals and described his reaction as personal, not reflecting GoF policy. Jouret suggested that the Lebanese might view the proposed "Beirut I" conference as seeking to create a system of international "tutelage" over Lebanon, which the new government would be likely to reject, though it would welcome a new donors conference. Poloff countered the "tutelage" assertion as without basis, stressing that we were seeking to work with, not impose ideas upon, the new Lebanese government, who would identify and set forth its needs to the international community. Jouret said he did not question the worthiness of U.S. intentions, but asserted further that a donor-driven reform process, as seen in the Palestinian example, would constitute a form of international tutelage. We needed to make sure that ownership of the reform process remained with the Lebanese. Jouret added that the issue was not whether Lebanon needed reforms, as the government clearly needed restructuring "from A to Z." The question remained how best could the international community help Lebanon, and whether the Lebanese would live up to international expectations. Jouret added that the U.S. and France should continue our careful and close coordination on Lebanon, best exemplified by the twin efforts of our ambassadors in Beirut. Despite his initial pessimism, Jouret was open to the proposal to hold informal planning meetings in Paris the week of June 13, as long as we kept these discussions discreet and did not give the impression that the future of Lebanon was being decided outside the country.

17. (C) Comment: To keep the French engaged and constructive on the post-election planning for Lebanon, we will need to keep our planning discreet before Lebanon's election cycle is complete and continue to hammer away at the "tutelage" argument, which gives the French a convenient (and false) point on which to distinguish their Lebanon policy from that of the U.S. To this end, it would be helpful if we can avoid drawing parallels between our post-election Lebanon approach and past experience with Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Palestinians, to remind the French that we understand that Lebanon is a unique case. While the GoF is still formulating its position, the repeated French cautions on including a security/military track in an international conference suggest a hardening GoF position on this point. End comment.

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